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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Association Miraisme International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The importance of education about religion as a means to prevent and mitigate violent extremism

The violence generated by hate speech and terrifying attacks on the community carried out in the name of religion are two types of recurring events with increasing frequency in modern Society . There is an alarming increase in the number of people joining armed groups whose aim is carrying out various acts of violence. This brings a negative stigma about religion by the rest of the community, which sees how the media broadcasts images of killings and attacks caused by members of a particular religious denomination, without making it clear that not a whole community but only a few are promoting violence as a manifestation of their faith.

Thus, as religious extremism increases, so do hate speeches. A clear example is the recent bombings in Paris last November 13th 2015[1], an event that shocked the international community for its cruelty and violence. The subsequent panic attacks and widespread fear in the population caused a tense situation that was spread across all continents.

After these and other events characterized by violence in the name of religion, and carried out in different parts of the world, a renowned businessman and candidate for the US presidential election asked to clearly prohibit entry to the United States to members of a particular religion[2]. These statements are considered by some sectors of the population as an electoral strategy to play with the widespread fear in the community, now more vulnerable to such messages.

Obviously, the two events are completely reprehensible and deserve the attention of all organizations that defend human rights and coexistence with respect and it is considered that now is the the time to act and prevent and mitigate such acts, which directly assault the dignity of individuals.

As pointed out by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in a report submitted on December 29th 2014[3]: "States should use all available mean, including education and outreach to the community, to promote a culture of respect, non-discrimination and valuing of diversity in Society".

The absolute value of the human being as the bearer of inalienable rights is a term that should be developed and internalized by all members of society and especially by those in which the plurality is wider. Such internalization of human values and dignity would allow communities to move toward coexistence with respect.

Information gaps cause many people to be unaware of the true dogmatic basis of religions and to be enlisted in groups that distort the doctrine of their religious communities. The lack of accurate knowledge about others and the distorted references that media or members of these armed groups might offer are elements that promote violence in all its forms.

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[1] RTVE. The bombings in Paris. Retrieved February 6: http://www.rtve.es/noticias/atentados-en-paris/

[2] Donald Trump asks US to ban the entry of all Muslims. Retrieved February 6: http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/12/151207_eeuu_trump_entrada_musulmanes_ep

[3] UN. Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Expression. Retrieved February 6: http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/250/87/PDF/G1425087.pdf?OpenElement

It is for this reason that education plays a vital role in building tolerant and inclusive societies. Education as a means to internalize the human dignity of others, based on the true knowledge of the dogmatic foundations excluding doctrinal content, becomes a mechanism for the defense and promotion of human rights. This was considered by UNESCO when stating that: "There is a number of groups around the world that have spoken of the need to teach the different religions in each nation to better understand and overcome the intolerance that ignorance brings along"[4].

In the same way, such an idea was reflected in the report of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues presented last January 5 (2015). In such a report Rita Izsak highlights the role of education as to 'promote intercultural understanding, mutual respect and tolerance between groups' of different communities. Therefore, it is considered that: 'Education in human rights should be an important part of school curricula, which should also include the history, culture and traditions of minority groups as well as its important contribution to the enrichment of our societies'.

The design and implementation of public policies for the introduction of this type of content in the plans of study of schools involves different types of benefits for the community and for the students. Among them the following are noteworthy:

a) Increased knowledge about the basic fundaments of the different religious communities.

b) Higher levels of tolerance towards those whose profess a different religion.

c) Fewer people who enlist in armed groups that promote violence in the name of religion.

According to the above, we propose here to include in educational programs the study of different religions, in the same way that different philosophical, political and artistic movements are studied; revealing its history, its geographical position, customs and general principles as a tool for the exercise of freedom and as a mechanism to reduce the vulnerability of certain groups towards the messages of violence and extremism.

Knowledge about different religions brings together students to diverse and distant cultural dimensions, expanding their ability to understand the global reality in which they live and the different individuals that belong to such reality. Thus, information and knowledge as a means to integrate properly the principles and values that set the different faiths will be promoted.

We can not ignore religion if we consider that, even without professing a particular doctrine religion is all around us; for history, art, and culture, among others, are all impregnated of religious elements. Thus, it is necessary to promote interfaith dialogue as a way to harmonize different points of view, fostering respect and seeking solutions to the problems that arise internationally. Through this dialogue, communities characterized by justice and peace that fully comply with the guarantees of the dignity of people will be promoted.

All this is proposed while respecting parental rights and the freedom of the students, who in his intimate sphere are those who develop feelings of faith and their power to understand the basic ideas that underpin their religious beliefs and personal maturity[5].

[4] Tolerance as the threshold of peace. United Nations for the Education, Science and Culture. France.
[5] Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Expression . Retrieved February 6, 2016 from: http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/7920446.39587402.html

Full compliance with the rights of the individual is achieved as long as their individual rights are protected effectively and in a way that all citizens enjoy their rights thus promoting tolerance and coexistence with respect.

In conclusion, the inclusion of human rights, different religious and beliefs as part of education programs allows citizens to develop a broad and inclusive way of thinking, far from violent, intolerant or discriminatory attitudes.